

PRELUDE TO COMMUNISM

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But peasant prosperity, especially in a village so close to Sofia, was also based on black-market activities. Even in 1945 economists estimated that about ninety-five per cent of all dairy products reached the urban consumer through the black market at prices fantastically high. The peasants, moreover, had learned new ways of circumventing government requisitioning during the war. Just after harvesting, while rye and wheat crops were still in the field, they would shake from one-fifth to one-fourth of the grain onto blankets and secretly hide this amount from the Germans. Then they would, as the law decreed, take the sheaves to the village to be threshed. A part of this threshed grain, varying in amount each year with the size of the harvest, had to be turned over to the authorities at prices fixed by the government, but the previously sequestered grain could be used at home or disposed of at black market prices.

One additional economic factor of importance² was the rise in land values, which surpassed the general rise in prices. For instance, I had not been in the village long before I learned how valuable was the land on the right as one approached the village from Sofia. Within two years the land had gone up ten times, from 35 leva per square meter to 300-400 leva. No wonder then that peasants had been ridding themselves of their debts, selling a field or two if necessary to put them in the clear. Some of the poorer families had been deriving extra income from the earnings of about twenty teen-aged girls who went daily to Sofia to work in the knitting mill. This was a concession to industrialism which the Dragalevtsy peasants would not have made back in 1937, and it was already having some effect upon village life.

But perhaps one of the greatest economic changes was the reversal of the trend toward dairying mentioned in earlier chapters. Shortly after my departure from Dragalevtsy, a milk producers' co-operative had been established in the village, largely through government prompting and support, and collected all of the milk formerly taken to Sofia by the individual milkmen. The co-operative also ran a grocery store and sold large quantities of feed to the farmers. Owing to price policies of the co-operative and the government price-fixing agency, the peasants began to consider dairying unprofitable. They

² [Following World War II -- Analyst]

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